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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to compare selected characteristics of University of Maryland College Park black freshmen with those of black freshmen nationally. Summer 1972 orientation black freshmen and Fall 1971 national black freshmen in predominantly white universities were the subjects of the study. The responses of 194 black freshmen on the University Student Census prepared by the Counseling Center, University of Maryland, and the responses of 1,984 black freshmen on the Student Information Form prepared by the American Council on Education were compared. Both instruments were similar in purpose. Results indicate that College Park black freshmen were similar to black freshmen in predominantly white universities. In particular, both groups of freshmen indicated a need for academic assistance, e.e., tutoring; were concerned about grades, meeting financial expanses, and adjusting to college. Each hoped to get a better job by attending college and nearly two-thirds planned more education beyond college. Both had the support of parents in their decision to attend college and appeared similar on high school achievement. Additional characteristics specific to the College Park sample were presented and discussed. (Author)

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Mary A. Strader, Glenwood C. Brooks, Jr.
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SUMMARY

The purpose of the study was to compare selected characteristics of College Park black freshmen with those of black freshmen nationally. Summer 1972 orientation black freshmen and Fall 1971 national black freshmen in predominantly white universities were the subjects of the study. The responses of 194 black freshmen on the University Student Census prepared by the Counseling Center, University of Maryland, and the responses of 1,984 black freshmen on the Student Information Form prepared by the American Council on Education were compared. Both instruments were similar in purpose. Results indicate that College Park black freshmen were similar to black freshmen in predominantly white universities. In particular, both groups of freshmen indicated a need for academic assistance, i.e., tutoring; were concerned about grades, meeting financial expenses and adjusting to college. Each hoped to get a better job by attending college and nearly two-thirds planned more education beyond college. Both had the support of parents in their decision to attend college and appeared similar on high school achievement. Additional characteristics specific to the College Park sample were presented and discussed.

In his study, "The Black College Freshman: Characteristics and Recent Trends," Bayer (1972) reported on the characteristics of black freshmen entering institutions in the Fall, 1968 and 1971. The Bayer study has significance because it represents one of the first national studies of the characteristics of black college freshmen. The Cultural Study Center, University of Maryland at College Park, has conducted a number of studies on the characteristics of black college freshmen, but the generalizability of such studies has been questioned. Thus, the purpose of this study was to compare the characteristics of College Park black freshmen with black freshmen nationally. Though Bayer (1972) reported on black freshmen in both black and white institutions, the comparison with College Park black freshmen is limited to the predominantly white universities.

Method

One hundred and ninety four entering 1972 summer orientation black freshmen, three-fourths of whom were female, made up the College Park sample. Responses of the black freshman sample were taken from the University Student Census, a demographic and attitudinal questionnaire administered to entering students by the Counseling Center. The Fall 1971 responses of the entering black freshman population cited in Bayer (1972) were used for comparison purposes. Responses of the national black freshmen (N=1,984) were taken from the Student Information Form prepared by the American Council on Education, an instrument similar in purpose to the University Student Census. The response modes used in the two studies differ but comparisons are still possible with rank ordering. Thus, the comparisons should be viewed in "greater than" or "lesser than" terms rather than as precise similarities or differences.

Results and Discussion

Ask most entering freshmen the question: do you want any help or tutoring? and the likely answer would be, yes! Bayer (1972) reported that over one half (53%) of the 1971 black freshmen felt that they needed tutoring or remedial work, particularly in mathematics. While the above question was somewhat differently phrased for entering 1972 College Park black freshmen, the thrust of the question was essentially the same. All but 16% of the College Park black freshmen indicated an interest in seeking counseling and/or educational skills services. In fact, College Park black freshmen expected the hardest adjustments to college to be studying efficiently (24%) and earning satisfactory grades (20%). Meeting financial expenses, selecting a major field of study and/or a career and suddenly being expected to be a critical and independent thinker were among the next most expected difficult adjustments to college.

Black freshmen, nationally and at College Park, gave a pragmatic reason for attending college. Eighty percent of the national black freshmen and nearly one half (49%) of the College Park black freshmen reported attending college to get a better job. Other reasons mentioned by College Park freshmen (i.e., less job specific) included intellectual interests and appreciation of ideas or independence of thinking and behavior (26%). Few College Park black freshmen (13%) mentioned attending college to develop the ability to get along with different kinds of people or to develop confidence in taking a stand on things they believe in. Developing job skills as a reason for attending college does not appear as non-academic as might be the case. Fifty-two percent and 4% respectively of the national black freshmen plan to attend graduate and professional school; similarly 30% and 33% respectively of the College Park freshmen plan to attend graduate and professional school. The percent of College Park black freshmen who plan to attend professional school was much higher than that

of the national black freshmen. However, fewer College Park black freshmen planned to attend graduate school so the overall figures (66% national and 62% College Park) of black freshmen planning to attend graduate or professional school were remarkably similar. Sixty-seven percent of the males and 66% of the females from the national black freshman sample, and 78% of the males and 45% of the females from the College Park black freshman sample planned to attend graduate or professional school. Black male freshmen tended to pick professional school over graduate school at a slightly higher rate, while black female freshmen tended to pick graduate school. Actual percents of all black graduating seniors who attend graduate or professional school range between 40% and 50%. Taking into account attrition, College Park black freshmen will attend graduate and professional school in reduced numbers (compared to the 66% national figure) but still somewhat higher than nonblacks (Bayer, 1972).

Nationally, black freshmen reported having a C+ or higher high school average and rank in the top half of their class. The percent of College Park black freshmen having a C+ or higher high school average and rank in the top half of their class is not known. However, because the University requires a C or higher high school average and rank in the top half of their class, the liklihood is that both samples are similar to one another.

Both national and College Park black freshmen (31% vs 50%) reported that their parents supported their decision to attend college and gave some indication that their high school counselor (9% for both) advised them to attend "this" college. Few black freshmen, nationally or at College Park (2% vs 5%) selected a college because friends or relatives currently or previously attended. This is not surprising for College Park, given the recency of black enrollment at the University. Oddly enough, costs of college was not among the major reasons for

attending a college, but the academic program was. Both national and College Park black freshmen (42% vs 37%) reported that the college offered the kind of academic program "they wanted." Geographical location, aside from the academic program offered, was the next most mentioned reason for attending a college, and Bayer (1972) reported that black freshmen were about as likely as nonblacks to attend a college a greater or lesser distance from home. As for costs of college, 86% of the national black freshmen reported concern about college finances and College Park black freshmen indicated that lack of college finances would be the most likely reason for dropping out of college. (The reported estimated parental income for the national black freshmen was $7,999 and for nonblacks $14,700. The College Park parental income is more tentative but the Office of Student Aid reports that it is about the same as the national sample.) Thus, college finances are not a minimal concern of black freshmen and they could be characterized as indicating "My first concern is being admitted to college; I'll worry about the money next." Geographical location was not actually the next most mentioned reason of College Park black freshmen, but "Other" (25%) was. "Other," however, had no explicit meaning; it could be viewed as a response of protest, of refusal or to indicate a missing alternative, more appropriate. "Other," in this instance, is not an obvious response and should be examined for implications.

National and College Park black freshmen rated themselves higher on personal traits such as friendliness, independence, cheerfulness, drive to achieve and understanding of others, in comparison to academic ability traits. Both groups (71% vs 49%) felt strongly about civil rights or the issue of racism. For example, 75% of the national black freshmen felt that the federal government was not doing enough to promote school desegregation and nearly half (45%) of the College Park black freshmen felt that the racist image and practices of the University dissuaded blacks from attending.

While there would be other comparisons of interest between the national and College Park black freshmen, there are some items of interest specific to College Park black freshmen. Seventy-two percent of the College Park black freshmen decided on their vocational goal prior to coming to College Park, of which 43% were quite certain or had clearly fixed vocational goals. Both sexes had the same degree of certainty about their vocational goal but black males tended to decide on their vocational goal in their junior year of high school (27% male vs 17% female) or in the sophomore year of high school (22% male vs 8% female) while black females tended to decide on their vocational goal in the senior year of high school (4% male vs 24% female). A look at when major field of study was decided upon shows that more black male freshmen than black female freshmen (33% vs 24%) had not yet decided on one and that fewer black male freshmen decided on a major field of study as early as the freshman year of high school (6% male vs 14% female). Holland (1965) provided an intriguing theory on vocational decisions of college students and that was; ask them what they would like to do, their response would be just as accurate as that obtained by any other means. The College Park black freshmen were asked to select one of six Holland vocational types which best described them. Black male freshmen tended to select "Other" (34%) or Investigative (27%), while black females selected Conventional (32%) or "Other" (20%). What was interesting was that the black male and female freshmen selected stereotypical vocational sex roles, i.e., "prestigious" jobs for males and "non-prestigious" jobs for females. The large "Other" response is of concern and is under study as a nonintellective predictor of freshman grades (Horowitz, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1972; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1974).

There are many instructional modes today, so College Park black freshmen were asked to select their preference. Black male freshmen tended to select

TV lectures (37% vs 1% female) and black female freshmen tended to select small group study (12% male vs 38% female). Laboratory work and independent study under the direction of a professor was preferred by 20% of the black males and 19% of the black females. Lecture combined with no classes (i.e., read and talk with others and take exams periodically) was the least preferred instructional mode by both black male and female freshmen. Public versus private high school graduation might have accounted for preferences on instructional modes but all but a small percent of black freshmen graduated from public high school-college academic curriculum. From the first and second preferences, it can be said that black male freshmen prefer little or no direct contact with professors while black female freshmen prefer direct contact. Admissions studies have shown that black female freshman grades are more predictable than those of black male freshmen, using traditional and non-traditional predictors, but instructional mode preference has not been studied. It may be that black male freshmen with the same instructional mode preference as black female freshmen are equally predictable on grades.

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